

The Fairest Flower

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Let's start with a problem as it might appear in Bidding Forum. Presume you are playing five-card majors.

IMPs DLR: North VUL: NS

♠ 7
♥ QJ53
♦ 84
♣ AKJ1072

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|-----------------|-------|------|-------|
| — | 1♥ | 1♠ | 2♣ |
| 3♦ ¹ | Pass | 4♠ | ? |

1. Shows spades and diamonds.

This probably isn't much of a problem. Though I've seen how poorly panellists predict the vote of their compatriots, I am confident that 5♥ would be a nearly unanimous choice.

If you agreed with that choice, or if you passed and then pulled partner's double, you would have suffered a 12 IMP loss. The full deal was:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|--------------|---|--|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| ♠ A Q J 2 | | ♠ K 10 6 5 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ A 9 8 7 6 | | ♥ K 10 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 7 6 | | ♦ A J 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 | | ♣ 8 6 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ 9 8 4 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ 4 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ K Q 10 9 5 3 | <table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | E | | | S | | |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | E | | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ 9 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ 7 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ Q J 5 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 8 4 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ A K J 10 7 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |

At the other table, your counterparts played 4♥. West raised spades to the two-level, and East had too much apparent strength to consider saving. North took 11 tricks on a normal spade lead. When the deal was played, I held the East cards. After bidding 4♠ (thinking it might make!), I doubled 5♥. Because West's bid showed values in diamonds, I

led ♦A, and we got a plus.

The definition we use is that a Flower Bid is a jump-shift to an unbid suit below game-level, agreeing partner's suit in any competitive auction. In principle, the jump shows nine cards in the two suits along with the values to compete to the level chosen. In practice, overbids on hands with a known fit often work out fairly well, as West's adventure on the illustrated deal demonstrates. The jumper should have honour concentration, not just length, in the 'flower' suit. A jump from a minor to a major shows at least five of the major and is non-forcing. When the initial bid is a major, the jump is forcing and can therefore be used more creatively; extreme honour concentration may compensate for lack of length in the suit. The primary purpose of the bid is to allow the initial bidder to assess the extent to which the partnership's cards are working offensively v. defensively. A secondary purpose is to indicate an effective lead should the enemy buy the contract.

I don't know the origin of the name used for this convention. It seems to be played most commonly as a passed-hand jump response. The theory underlying the usage advocated here can be traced to J. R. Verne's brilliant statistically-based essay on the law of total tricks. In addition to demonstrating the importance of the number of trumps held when determining the proper level in competitive auctions, Verne noted the increased trick-taking potential of double fits.

Let's return to the bidding problem as originally posed. South could scarcely avoid the five-level because the magnificent support for partner's suit had not yet been revealed. However, note the transformation achieved if South shows both suits at once via a 3♣ bid over East's overcall. EW may well retire from the auction; even if they don't, a respectable NS result will be achieved. North will double 4♠ (defeating it three fairly easily), and South will respect that decision after having shown strong heart support.

Even if you are think a strong jump shift is a

away in competitive auctions. The likelihood of a slam is greatly reduced when the opponents have the values to enter, and determining when to bid on and when to defend becomes a top priority. As Ed Manfield remarked years ago, we need more ways to support partner. The Flower bid is one of the most effective methods I know, and opportunities for its use occur frequently.

Ed: In Australia, we know the method as fit-showing jumps.

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